

Memorial Church of the
Good Shepherd
And Parish House

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THE RECTOR



An Historical Sermon

Delivered in the
Memorial Church of the Good Shepherd
Rosemont, Pa.

By the Rector
The Rev. Arthur B. Conger, A. M.

On the Third Sunday after Trinity
June 12th, 1910



Printed by order of the Committee on Consecration and Dedication.



Psalm ciii, vs. 1 and 43

"G^o give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious: and His mercy endureth forever.

"Whoso is wise will ponder these things: and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

An Historical Sermon



WE must go back more than a quarter of a century, when the present rectorship had existed little more than a year. It became evident that the Church, situated as it was, could not do the work of God in this growing community. Nine hundred acres were held in two portions on the west, on which there was little probability of development, and the populous district which lay to the east was barred by an hill which, for a period of twenty years, had proved prohibitive to all but twelve families. The first Lenten course had been delivered to a congregation which, beginning with three, had progressively advanced till on the last night, in Holy Week, it had attained to twelve. It seemed to the rector that the Church ought to be placed in a position close to where the people dwelt. It was a subject of frequent conversation; and when the Bishop made his annual visitation it was a subject to which his attention never failed to be brought. He saw the merit of the proposition from the first, and, we say it with profound



gratitude, he never permitted himself to be swerved from his original attitude.

We made an effort eighteen months antecedent, which was defeated; but on May 7th, 1892, Mr. Harry B. French made an offer which resulted in the erection of the present Church. I think I ought to say that that was the most liberal offer I ever heard of. The Church was to be a memorial; it was to be free and to be held for the purposes of our Communion. But the Vestry had twenty-five thousand dollars, afterwards increased to twenty-seven, placed in its hands practically without restriction. We might have built a small wooden structure, and a parish house, and had all free of debt. The Vestry wisely, I think, decided to build for the future, with the result you see before you.

It is not to be wondered at that, on the 12th of May following, the Vestry voted to accept Mr. French's most magnanimous proffer, and to proceed with all the expedition compatible with wisdom to carry it to good effect. And here we feel compelled to record, what we wish we need not, that there were two dissentient votes in our Vestry of twelve. Our sympathies were warmly in accord with the sentiment of those who differed from us. We, too, had associations with the old Church which were very dear and memories that were hallowed. But, of



MEMORIAL CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, ROSEMONT, PA.



course, they could not rival either in intensity or sacredness those of some, at least, who still we did not feel that we could give way to. We felt, in fact, that the interest of God's work should be pre-eminent. The Law of the Church required that we should obtain the permission of the Standing Committee of the Diocese, and we felt that its decision must be determinative. I remember saying to one of our opponents that it would be to me the voice of God, and so I have ever regarded it. When, therefore, on the twentieth of June in that year, the Standing Committee gave us a virtually unanimous judgment, only one member voting in the negative, and that, as was explained to us, on the ground that he never would favor a movement of the kind, not that he saw any special objection to this one of ours, we felt that Divine Providence had smiled on our undertaking and bidden us hasten it to completion. In this faith I have never wavered.

The explanation of the subsequent conduct of the Standing Committee I leave to those who have an insight into a certain type of mind, or lack of mind, to which my poor intelligence is impervious. When in August I heard from some of the principal watering-places that members of it were talking against our scheme; when by the following Christmas I heard that some of their voices were raised in protest in some of the more prominent capitals

of Europe, I was surprised. But when sixteen months after their decision, after the Church was built, they sent us notice that they had ordered "a rehearing with a view to the rescission of their judgment," I was dumfounded. I should not like at this day to be called upon to assign their motive. Of course, when it came to the rehearing it immediately became evident even to their lucidity or opacity, as you may prefer, that they could do nothing. And I mention the circumstance only because I have ever been convinced that the difficulties in which we were for years involved were due to the encouragement our opponents received from those who had given their franchises in our favor. Do you ask me, then, what becomes of my faith in their judgment being the voice of God? My reply is that that was their *official* sentence. They were then speaking as the organs of the Church. Besides, you know God employs what often appear to us strange media of His will. There is Balaam, for example.

In the meantime, in March, 1893, suit was brought against us, and this dragged its weary length along for nine years, at a cost to us, including the mortgages which we were obliged to place on both properties in order to hold them, of two thousand dollars a year.

This Church was opened for worship on the First Sunday after Trinity, May 27th, 1894. The Bishop was

present and preached to a congregation which crowded the edifice from the chancel to the door, a sermon which gladdened the hearts of us all. In the evening it was the privilege of the rector to say something of what was in his heart concerning the character and attainments of her in whose memory the Church was built—this also to a crowded congregation, which we interpreted as an augury of the large work which the future would demand of us.

The community welcomed us with cordiality from the beginning; our congregations were large from the first. But we had no Parish House, and therefore were unable to have meetings and work which would have quickened interest once kindled, and elicited it in those newly ours. In addition to that it was exceedingly difficult to raise the money to support the Church, maintain our properties and defend ourselves in the courts. And as the condition continued year after year, and nobody could predict its term, it became trying to everyone. Many were discouraged, and I think I may say all were perplexed. We had many good friends. They were most loyal, and their fidelity to us cost them large sums, involving great personal sacrifices, but they never murmured. Among them I take pleasure in naming Mr. Wm. H. Ingham and Mr. Spencer Ervin, both of whom have gone to their reward. And then when one of our friends on whom we





most relied would die, you may be sure there was among us great searchings of hearts.

The apprehension in many quarters you can readily imagine increased as time seemed to bring us no relief. I was perfectly certain of what the ultimate decision of the court would be when its cumbrous machinery should at last permit it to utter itself, but a great many people were not. I was once asked, by a warm friend too, if I had ever thought of what we should do if the decision went against us. Besides we were at that time running behind about eight hundred dollars a year. I shall never forget one afternoon when a lady, who thought nothing of throwing away that sum and many multiples of it too, said to me, "I can see the Church shut up." There used to be a good deal of that kind of talk, and I found it necessary in a Vestry meeting once to put a stop to it forever by calling attention to the fact that no one could close the Church but me, and I wouldn't. We were in debt, and there were those who said our course was not honest.

I tell you these things—and I have not told you a quarter of the trials through which we passed—in order that you may realize that it was with no little difficulty, it was with no slight self-sacrifice, that your Vestry and those who stood with them through all those dark years

purchased for you the privilege of having such a Church as this in your midst—accessible, spacious, magnificent. And then, besides, I want you to see, as I have never failed to, the good Hand of God in it all. I submit that no one could know all the circumstances and not feel that God's Providence was over our work at every stage. He has chastised us, it is true, lest our hearts should be lifted up and we forget Him, but when we really needed succor He has never failed to intervene. Why else was it that in our hours of direst need someone came forward to arrest catastrophe? Why was it when we lost one friend who seemed indispensable that another, perhaps two, appeared to fill the gap? I tell you that it was because our work was God's work, and He fostered it with loving care. "We went through fire and water, and *Thou* hast brought us out into a wealthy place." "Whoso is wise will ponder *these* things, and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

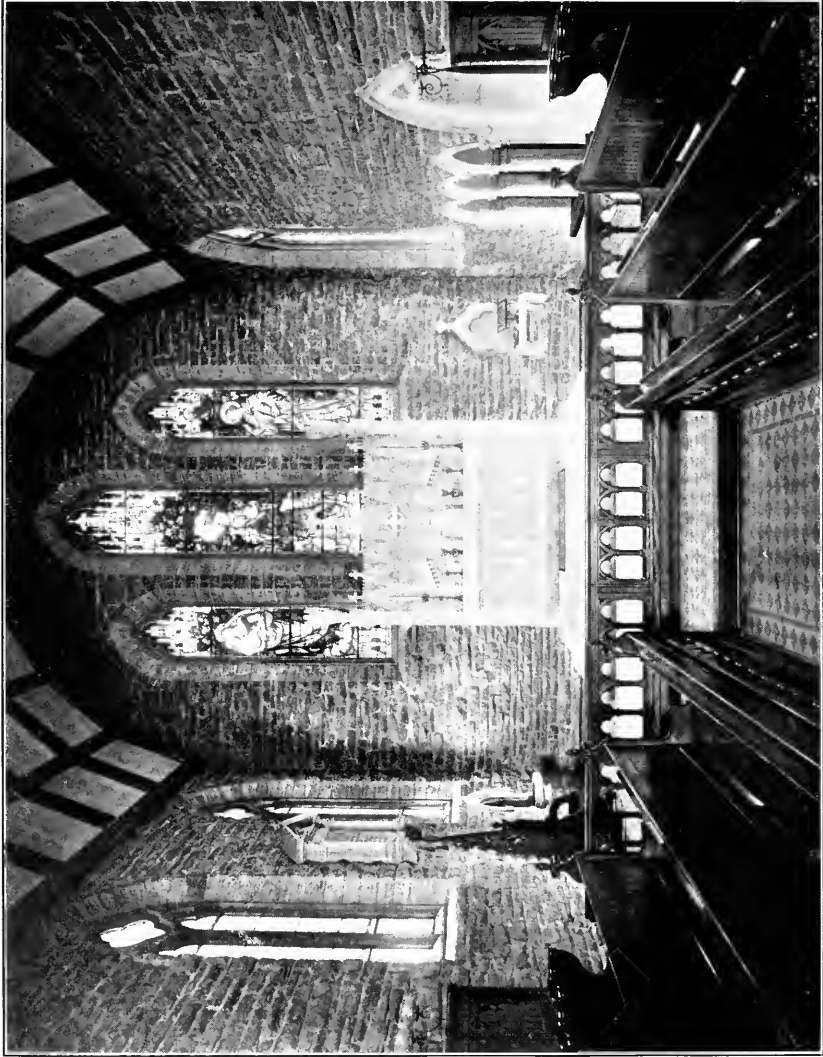
There is one aspect of the condition which affects the expediency of the change of location which ought not to pass unnoticed. This whole district was twenty-five years ago a summer resort. Hotels were crowded, and lesser hostelries, many of which have gone out of existence, had their full complement of guests. This is so no longer. But in the time of which I speak, people from



these places of accommodation, representing all the more prominent parishes in Philadelphia, used to crowd the Church for four months in the year. And these people were liberal. They gave largely through the offertory, and at the end of the season, as they were returning to town, would give me at least fifty dollars, most of them an hundred, some more, to carry us through the winter months, and thank me for asking them. Nearly all revenue from such a source has been withdrawn, and it seems difficult to say where the support of the Church would have come from. The resident congregation never did meet its expenses. It will appear, I think, to anyone who will carefully consider the situation, that it never would.

The building itself is in the best English gothic style of a country Church of the fourteenth century. Its proportions are fine, its acoustics perfect. We have still much to do in the way of its completion and adornment; but we have every encouragement to go on and finish the good work, for every addition that has been made in pursuance of the architect's plan has increased the beauty and churchliness of the building to a degree not antecedently expected. At first, for example, the chancel seemed to many disproportionately large; but when on November 10th, 1898, the congregation placed the choir stalls in position, as a memorial to Mrs. Conger—for which it





THE MEMORIAL ALTAR

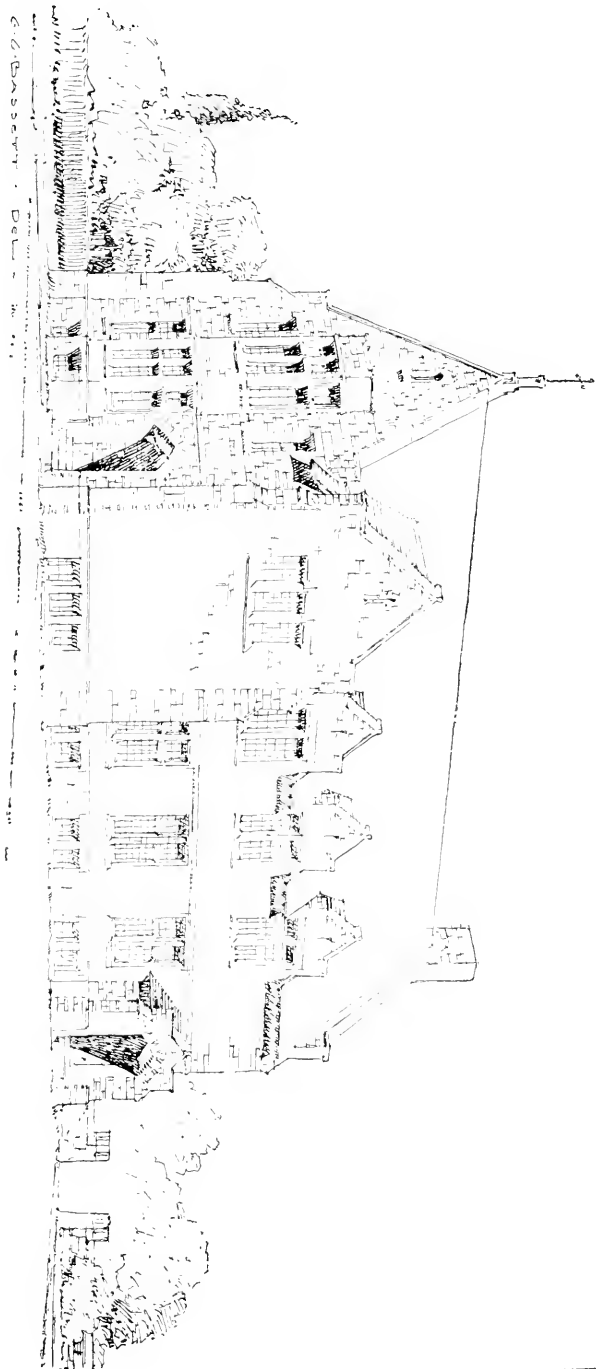
gives me pleasure to make renewed grateful acknowledgments—and we had our first service with a vested choir, we realized that the proportions of the chancel lent dignity and even a certain grandeur to the entire edifice which impressed one, at once, with a sense that it was one constructed to inspire and to aid worship. The same is true of our most beautiful altar, the gift of a member of our Vestry, a memorial to his parents, blessed on the eve of Passion Sunday, 1905. Those who were present will remember how universal was the exclamation that it added a dignity and beauty to the whole Church which no one would have been able to anticipate. This made some of the old furniture look out of place and almost shabby, and so by the following Whitsunday this beautiful pulpit and lectern were presented, gifts from those whom we have hardly ever seen without the necessity to say “thank you” for something. We have had many beautiful windows given, the inscriptions on which will reveal their source. One double window in the chancel is ordered and expected by All Saints. A new isle window should be in place this week. But you all know how every step, no matter how slight, in the fulfillment of our plan contributes to the appearance of the entire effect to an extent that we would not have beforehand thought. In the judgment of the rector, the two gifts that would be





the greatest improvement to our Church to-day are the Rose window in the west wall, and the Rood Screen—costly, both of them, especially the former; but I think any donor of either may look forward with pleasure to that excess in effect and beauty which has more than repaid their many predecessors.

On October tenth last, Mrs. J. Ogden Hoffman, for herself and her sons, asked of the Vestry the privilege of presenting a Parish House in memory of Mr. Hoffman. This has been a desideratum throughout the sixteen years we have been in our present place. It was, therefore, with great joy and gratitude that we welcomed and accepted the proposal. To those of you who were present at the dedication of it yesterday there is little that I can say. Its architecture, consonant with that of the Church, makes it a fitting companion to stand by the side of this superb edifice. The beauty and proportions of the interior and the adaptation of its different rooms for the purposes contemplated in their use are obvious to all. And to those of us who still look back upon the old Church with affection and reverence it is edifying to read in the Memorial Tablet that the building is not only a memorial to him we knew and loved, but perpetuates the memory of the good examples of the two Bishops commemorated in it. It will also give satisfaction to many to know that



THE PARISH HOUSE

Wm. H. Smith
9/27/1909.



as far as possible the materials of the old Church were incorporated in this Parish House.

It shall ever be a cause for thanksgiving to God and keen satisfaction to us all that the memorial character of our two exquisite buildings is the outcome of the spiritual work of the parish. Both the donors and those whose memory they embalm in lasting monuments developed, where they did not begin, their religious life here as members of this congregation. Here, I feel confident, we have something unique. I doubt if a duplicate can be found in the world. That both our buildings should be memorials is in itself remarkable. But that they should also bear this conspicuous testimony to the spiritual activity of the parish is probably unparalleled, and should fill our hearts with joy and deep gratitude to God.

And we have much to rejoice in, in the types of character commemorated. Those of us who knew her will always remember Mrs. French as an ideal of womanhood, enthusiastic in her loving devotion as wife and mother, the gifted mind and almost boundless heart making her conversation an opportunity and pleasure, and in her religious life devoted, without cant. She had a profound love for her dear Lord and a clear knowledge of His truth and work, but her manifestations of both were entirely without ostentation.





Of my friend, of almost my entire adult life, it would be difficult for me to speak adequately even were I free; but I have been made to promise that I shall be brief and reserved. This much I must say: Mr. Hoffman was a polished gentleman, a chivalrous husband, a devoted father; the keen, intelligent, industrious and therefore successful business man. He was everywhere respected, and I feel confident that he never did a dishonorable thing in his life. His nature was formed on the highest lines, and anything mean or low would always have been abhorrent to it. His friendship was a boon and a delight to all who had the privilege of sharing it. His religious life was a conspicuous illustration of St. Paul's utterance, "The goodness of God leadeth us to repentance." God prospered him in a manner and to an extent of which he had formed not even an imagination. Immediately his faith sprang into activity. Gratitude to God who had been so good to him called forth his most earnest activities. In good works he was untiring, and not less so in his spiritual duties. He stands out in my mind as the single instance in my parochial experience of a man being led to God by prosperity. I have seen many who, when God has crowned their labors with success, appeared, at least, so much engrossed with the fruits of His blessing that they had little time for the Donor. And I shall

always regard it as a conspicuous testimonial to Mr. Hoffman's noble and exalted character that when he was made conscious of God's loving-kindness he felt that any return he could make was all too little.

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all."

And when in the days, yea, generations, to come our boys and girls shall grow up here, forming their ideals, developing their characters, laying deep the foundations of their spiritual life, it is inspiring to think of the blessing they shall derive from the memorials of this Church and Parish House.

To all of you who, in the many departments of our parish activity, have contributed to the result we have now attained I desire to make my affectionate acknowledgments and offer my most hearty congratulations. But I am confident that you will feel with me that the real object of our gratitude is our loving God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It has been by His blessing, Providence and watchful care that we have been able to do anything, and those who know best the inner history of the development of our work, I am sure you agree with me, will feel this most deeply. And I ask you to join me in an outburst of praise that shall come from our deepest hearts—



"O, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious and His mercy endureth forever."

I think that every member of this parish ought to feel that his and her privileges are very great indeed. A great deal has been done for us. We have two handsome and well-appointed buildings which have cost most of us either nothing or little. It devolves then, it would appear, upon every individual to give of his time, strength, devotion, money, that the great purposes for which both these buildings have been erected may be furthered, to the utmost ability of each. The office of a drone should be empty and looked upon as contemptible from this day forward. And I have great confidence in you, my people. Let each one of you feel that this is his work, this is her work, quite as much as mine. We have different offices and functions, but our interest is identical. We have attained a great point of vantage in our work only that we may advance from that strategic position to higher and more blessed achievement, and I leave you with this sentiment, which made men's hearts thrill with enthusiasm and hope when, fifty years ago, it fell from the poet's pen:

"Men my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping
something new;
That which they have done but earnest of the
things that they shall do."





